16. MALABAR TROGON *HARPACTES FASCIATUS* PENNANT IN THE NILGIRIS UPPER PLATEAU, TAMIL NADU

On April 24, 2002 at the end of one of our bird community transects at Thiashola in the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, we heard an unknown, low, mewing call from inside the shola (Montane Wet Temperate forest). On following the call, we found a male Malabar Trogon *Harpactes fasciatus* perched in the middle canopy of a tall tree in the shola. Soon we heard another bird from about 40 m on the other side of the road. The call was a *cue-cue-cue* uttered frequently at regular intervals. Both the birds remained in the same patch for around ten minutes, while frequently flying from tree to tree. Later they flew away and could not be sighted again.

The Malabar Trogon has been reported as uncommon from the plains up to 1,500 m only (Ali and Ripley 1987) and hills up to 1,050 m (Ali 1999). This is the first record of this species from the Nilgiris Upper Plateau (one of the highest hill components of Western Ghats) at 2,150 m. Thiashola was revisited in May, June and July 2002, but no Malabar Trogon could be heard or seen. We presume that the species might be coming to the Upper Nilgiris only during the spring months, and return to the lower elevations before the onset of monsoon, when it becomes windy and cold.

In its range below 1,500 m it affects evergreen and moist deciduous forest, however, in the Nilgiris it was recorded in Montane Wet Temperate forests (shola). Thiashola forest is located in the southwest of the Nilgiris Upper Plateau, where the hill range abruptly falls to the low lying Coimbatore and Palakad division. Presumably, some of these birds might be coming higher up during summer, from the neighbouring Silent Valley forest, Neelambur Forest Division or Palghat section.

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ASHFAQ AHMED ZARRI
ASAD R. RAHMANI
Bombay Natural History Society,
Hornbill House, S.B. Singh Road,
Mumbai 400 023, Maharashtra, India.
Email: bnhs@bom4.vsnl.net.in

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17. FISH IN THE DIET OF THE BLACK DRONGO *DICRURUS MACROCERCUS* VIEILLOT

The Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus* is well known as an omnivore, feeding predominantly on insects, occasionally on lizards, small birds and small bats. It has also been recorded feeding on flower-nectar, moths, butterflies and insects (COMPACT HANDBOOK, Ali and Ripley 1987). However, fish have not been reported in its diet.

On the morning of April 28, 2002, I was observing the feeding behaviour of White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*), Small Blue Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*), Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*), House Crow (*Corvus splendens*) and Jungle Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*) in a small pond in Nalangkattalai village in Thiruvarur district, Tamil Nadu. The pond was almost dry because of the summer heat, owing to which most of the fish had been caught by the villagers. The rest had died and were floating on the muddy water.

I saw five Black Drongos arrive at the site, and immediately all of them started feeding on the floating dead fish with other birds. They frequently dived at the floating fish and with the prey in their beaks, perched on a nearby Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) tree to feed. The fish were about 10 cm long. These birds kept feeding and hovering over the pond from 0830 to 1200 hrs, as long as the prey was available. However, the major share of the fish prey went to the kites, which dived and captured the floating fish repeatedly with great agility.

Although the Black Drongo prefers open, fallow paddy fields and grazing land for feeding on a variety of insect fauna, the availability of easy prey, like floating fish, may have tempted them to use the resource, or scarcity of food may have forced them to go for the fish. This observation deserves notice since there is no published record of the species feeding on dead fish.

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B. SENTHILMURUGAN
Bombay Natural History Society,
Hornbill house, S.B. Singh Road,
Mumbai 400 023, Maharashtra, India.
Email: bnhs@bom4.vsnl.net.in